The History Of Christmas Essay, Research Paper

The word Christmas comes from Cristes maesse, an early English phrase that means Mass of Christ.The word Xmas is sometimes used instead of Christmas. This tradition began in the early Christian church. In Greek, X is the first letter of Christ’s name. It was frequently used as a holy symbol.

Christmas is a Christian holiday that celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. No one knows the exact date of Christ’s birth, but most Christians observe Christmas on December 25. On this day, many go to church, where they take part in special religious services. During the Christmas season, they also exchange gifts and decorate their homes with holly, mistletoe, and Christmas trees

The story of Christmas comes chiefly from the Gospels of Saint Luke and Saint Matthew in the New Testament. According to Luke, an angel appeared to shepherds outside the town of Bethlehem and told them of Jesus’ birth. Matthew tells how the wise men, called Magi, followed a bright star that led them to Jesus.

The first mention of December 25 as the birth date of Jesus occurred in A.D. 336 in an early Roman calendar. The celebration of this day as Jesus’ birth date was probably influenced by pagan (unchristian) festivals held at that time. The ancient Romans held year-end celebrations to honor Saturn, their harvest god; and Mithras, the god of light. Various peoples in northern Europe held festivals in mid-December to celebrate the end of the harvest season. As part of all these celebrations, the people prepared special foods, decorated their homes with greenery, and joined in singing and gift giving. These customs gradually became part of the Christmas celebration.

In the late 300’s, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. By 1100, Christmas had become the most important religious festival in Europe, and Saint Nicholas was a symbol of gift giving in many European countries. During the 1400’s and 1500’s, many artists painted scenes of the Nativity, the birth of Jesus. An example of these works appears in the Jesus Christ article in the print version of The World Book Encyclopedia.

The popularity of Christmas grew until the Reformation, a religious movement of the 1500’s. This movement gave birth to Protestantism. During the Reformation, many Christians began to consider Christmas a pagan celebration because it included nonreligious customs. During the 1600’s, because of these feelings, Christmas was outlawed in England and in parts of the English colonies in America. The old customs of feasting and decorating, however, soon reappeared and blended with the more Christian aspects of the celebration.

In the 1800’s, two more Christmas customs became popular–decorating Christmas trees and sending Christmas cards to relatives and friends. Many well-known Christmas carols, including “Silent Night” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” were composed during this period. In the United States and other countries, Santa Claus replaced Saint Nicholas as the symbol of gift giving.

The celebration of Christmas became increasingly important to many kinds of businesses during the 1900’s. Today, companies manufacture Christmas ornaments, lights, and other decorations throughout the year. Other firms grow Christmas trees, holly, and mistletoe. Many stores and other businesses hire extra workers during the Christmas season to handle the increase in sales.

Bibliography

A short essay of the history of Christmas